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ABSTRACT

The New Jersey Mainstream Inservice Project is described as a response to the mandate of P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) for a comprehensive system of personnel development. The model stresses collaboration between the state department of education, 50 local school districts, and five institutions of higher education to provide regular educators with the skills and understanding to deal with exceptional children. Among problems confronted by the model were the state department's sole financial authority, limited personal association, and controversy over the use of the Discrepancy Evaluation Model. Eight implications of the project include the importance of building in support systems within and among collaborating institutions and of incorporating enough time for planning in the roles of staff members. (CL)

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PUBLIC LAW 94-142:

ONE RESPONSE TO THE PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT MANDATE

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PUBLIC LAW 94-142
AND ONE RESPONSE TO THE PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT MANDATE

Perhaps one of the most compelling lessons to be drawn from the implementation of P.L. 94-142 is the need to look at the manner in which inservice education is approached. Actualization of the intent of the law will require highly skilled professionals. This will dictate extensive training and retraining. A critical analysis of inservice education has revealed, however, many shortcomings (Joyce, et al, 1976). The important issue now, however, is how can these shortcomings be addressed.

The New Jersey Mainstream Project represents one response to that challenge. It attempts to translate the personnel development mandate of P.L. 94-142 into a meaningful and productive experience. This project is predicated upon three major hypotheses:

1. collaboration among and within different educational institutions is key to effective staff development and widespread change;
2. thoughtful, continuous planning in an environment of sustained support is an integral component in the evolution of effective staff development;
3. emphasis on institutionalization of the change process within the system, rather than investment and control by an individual is vital to the growth and development of the educational system.

According to the Rand Study (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975) a collaborative planning style is vital to both short and long term success of a change effort. The attainment of this style, however, is elusive since collaboration

remains a concept in search of an absolute definition. The components of collaboration accepted in the New Jersey project include working together to attain mutual goals through parity, ownership and participatory planning. Inherent in the acceptance of these facets of collaboration is the assumption that the gestalt is greater than and different from any of its parts. By stressing collaboration as a vehicle for maximum use of available resources, significant emphasis is therefore placed upon interrelationships, linkages, access and communication.

Planning or proactive thinking as contrasted with a "wait and see" or reactive stance is requisite to effective staff development. Planning must be based on a comprehensive needs assessment, logical sequencing and use of evaluation results. The process mandates the development of multiple methods for determining training needs and wants, the meshing of individual and organizational stages of change with attainment of specific objectives and setting up a system of continuous feedback of evaluative information. Effective planning requires knowledge of how systems and individuals accept or adopt innovations, a supportive institutional setting, and frequent and regular meetings.

All of these favorable conditions, however, are not sufficient for meaningful change. An inservice program linked to the objectives and/or expertise of a single individual cannot be sustained. From a simplistic perspective, the investment of the leadership and ownership role in one person leads to the disintegration of the program if that person leaves. In order for staff development to become a vital and enduring component of education it must be institutionalized. Arends (1978) describes this

as "the process of creating, originating, and establishing something of importance" resulting in "significant and permanent change (p. 34)."

Project Description

A primary goal of the New Jersey Mainstream Inservice Project is to link appropriate resources to personnel needs arising from attempts to implement the "least restrictive environment". The Project attempts to demonstrate that collaborative efforts among a variety of education agencies results in effective personnel development. Specifically the target group is personnel charged with responsibility for the education of handicapped children. In order to effect this process, the New Jersey Department of Education solicited proposals for mainstream staff development programs in the Spring of 1977. In May, 1977, 115 districts out of a possible 611 school districts submitted proposals. Subsequently, fifty local school districts were awarded annual grants of $1,000 for a period of three years. Grants were given on the basis of quality, geographic location and/or size. A representative sampling of the state was sought so that efforts could be examined in the context of demographic variability. Non-competitive proposals were required at the end of the first and second years to provide a means of measuring the written, planning and evaluation skills of the participants.

The selected school districts designated an inservice coordinator who has responsibility for implementing the grant proposal. This responsibility is assumed by an individual whose primary function in the school district is in some other role; e.g., learning disability consultant, resource room teacher, etc. These inservice coordinators spend ten days per year in regional and/or statewide seminars or workshops. The coordinators meet

monthly on a regional basis in groups of ten with a college/university consultant. Statewide meetings are scheduled in September and June. Seminar and workshop activity is designed to facilitate the implementation of the local inservice proposals which address fulfillment of "the least restrictive environment" mandated in Public Law 94-142. The types of inservice activities and target groups addressed vary.

A full-time faculty member from one of the five participating institutions of higher education in New Jersey serves as consultant to a group of ten local education agency inservice coordinators. The primary responsibility of the participating college faculty is to provide consultation in a group setting as well as individually in an environment that encourages district representatives as they plan, develop, implement and evaluate their inservice efforts.

Each college faculty member participates for a minimum of 50 days per year. Adjunct fees for three credits of release time each semester are paid by the State Department of Education to the appropriate college/university. Expenses and a stipend are paid to each college consultant for additional time devoted to the project that exceeds the responsibility of two three credit courses. In addition to monthly seminar meetings, college consultants are available for on-site visitations in the districts. They also participate in monthly planning sessions with state staff.

To aid the college consultants in meetings functions not normally associated with their professional on-campus role, ten days of professional development activity is provided. The approach to inservice of the college consultant has been eclectic in nature and has focused on the areas of lanning and evaluation, consultation skills and resources in mainstreaming.

Although there was an attempt to respond to expressed needs, the process of consultant development appears, in retrospect, to have lacked structure and consistency. With experience, however, we seem to be selecting more appropriate inservice opportunities. At this time, the structure of a specific preparation program for college faculty engaging in a consulting role is in the process of formulation.

The State Department of Education provides the necessary financial, material and management resources required. The Director is a full-time staff member of the State Department of Education. His responsibilities include overall administration and coordination of activities. A full-time university intern acts as administrative assistant to the director. A university faculty member is employed part-time by the State Department to coordinate the inservice effort for the participating college faculty.

Translating Assumptions into Experience

The experience of the past two years has been an excellent test for the Project's underlying values and assumptions. Collaboration is not an easy process. It requires a mutually accepted working definition of the term with clearly delineated responsibilities. Parity, feelings of ownership and participatory planning are valued concepts but they are difficult to actualize.

Vital to collaboration is personal contact between involved participants so that issues can be discussed and aired. This is especially difficult to achieve in a project involving a large number of individuals on a part-time basis. This Project has incorporated regular and periodic meetings. However, outside pressures, limited time to accomplish a

multitude of tasks and individuals with varying professional commitments have caused some serious questioning of the original conception of collaboration.

The most serious impediment to collaboration in this effort is the fact that fiduciary control and ultimate decision-making power rests exclusively with one institution, that is the State Department. Issues related to control have provoked periodic, intense conflict about the validity of collaboration under these conditions. Feelings of trust and empathy appear to waver when "collaboration" gives way to what appears to be unilateral decisions and directives. This has led to reconsideration of one of the project's underlying assumptions; i.e., that given the existing limitations, cooperation rather than collaboration may be a more appropriate basis for functioning.

In an attempt to overcome the problem of limited personal interaction, a great deal of information has been disseminated. This too has created problems. There is a limit to the amount of information which can be absorbed and it is difficult to ascertain what data have been used. With experience, the selection and dissemination of materials has progressed from a state of overwhelming paper blitz to a process that considers factors of readiness, appropriateness, and/or urgency. The process of effective information dissemination, however, continues to remain a major challenge.

Long range planning, like collaboration, is a process much discussed, but infrequently practiced. The work norm in education is often action based on limited planning. Hence, most participants initially felt the pressure to produce; i.e., put on an inservice activity. The Project's

emphasis on reflection, planning and evaluation seemed not to be relevant to the pressing immediate problems perceived by school districts.

In order to aid districts in the planning and implementation process, the State advocated the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) (Provus, 1971; Yavorsky, 1976), as the standard format for continuation grant applications. The model "seeks to provide information about educational programs to meet two purposes: improvement and assessment" (Yavorsky, p. 3). Since this was closely related to a basic objective for the Project, this model seemed well suited to the task. However, it was difficult to mandate a process in a project that stresses the importance of ownership, parity and participatory planning. It was especially difficult to mandate a process which requires effort and practice to achieve mastery. Resistance arose not only from district inservice coordinators; there was also a considerable amount of tension and resistance demonstrated by some of the college consultants.

Although the tension has decreased considerably, feelings of opposition still linger between proponents and opponents of DEM. In retrospect, the issue seems to be related far more to dimensions of power, control and authority than it does to the evaluation model. Despite less vocal resistance this year to writing continuation plans in the DEM format, the acceptance of the model for the purpose of the actual work effort remains unclear. In addition, the value of the model for actually facilitating the process of staff development is untested.

Although content has not been neglected (some participants might argue that point) comparatively less effort was expended in identifying resources than understanding good inservice practices. This decision led to expressions of frustration by inservice coordinators. The proclivity to identify "the"

expert or "the" package is formidable and is understandable given the day to day pressures educators must face. It was felt, however, that emphasis on planning and problem solving would lead to more germain presentations. Indeed a greater variety of inservice modes and stronger reliance on internal resources is emerging. In turn, the State Department of Education is beginning a serious effort to develop an efficient and relevant resource delivery system. The balancing of content and process and the development of an effective resource delivery mode remain a challenge.

Hutson (1979) suggested that for an inservice project to be successful, it ought to be both complex and ambitious. This Project appears to meet those criteria. However, it may be that the corollary was disregarded; i.e., that goals be clear and specific. Clarity has seemed to evolve, perhaps because there have been considerable restructuring and redesign. This has largely been due to the ongoing input solicited from participants.

There is probably general agreement that initially local school coordinators believed they were going to be recipients of definitive answers to inservice on mainstreaming. Instead, they were asked to be originators of solutions; i.e., problem solvers in a process where definitive answers are fleeting and highly dependent upon situation specific variables. Tension and anger arose when what was expected was not delivered. Increasingly, however, there has evolved the realization that "inservice problems are never really solved" (Hutson, p. 8) and a single model cannot be applied universally. This is not a comfortable stance, but one which would give support to the problem solving approach taken in the Project.

The first year concentrated on planning and tried to impose a sense of order on some rather diffuse and uncertain attempts to comply with the

inservice mandate of Public Law 94-142. There was, subsequently, increasing concern that efforts would be ephemeral, at best, if activities were limited to this narrow focus. It seemed logical to impress on participants that one measure of success was the installation within districts of a staff development process that could meet ever-changing content needs. To a large degree, this implied replicating a collaborative effort in schools which demonstrated broad-based participation, setting of mutual goals and shared decision making.

The implementation of inservice consisted of many more dimensions than participants had anticipated. It became increasingly evident that knowledge of "change" and an understanding of the role of a change agent were critical to effective staff development. It is in this area, however, that efforts have been somewhat haphazard and inconsistent. Project participants are by and large special educators. There is little in educational preparation programs that prepares one to be a change agent. It is a content area that was new to many.

The complexity of the situation and the increasing demands on participants resulted in the departure of some school districts and college consultants. The subsequent addition of new districts and college consultants has created additional unforeseen stresses centering around the incorporation of naive subjects into a sometimes amorphous but, nevertheless, established situation based on shared experiences.

Implications and Intimations

The success of the Project is necessarily closely related to the validity of the basic assumption. We are now struggling to collate and interpret the

mass of formal data that has accumulated. At the same time, we must deal with our personal involvement, our possibly skewed perceptions and informal feedback from a variety of sources.

Several factors seem worthy of recognition as issues for the third year and beyond; such information should also be useful to others involved in collaborative staff development efforts. The implementation of the original design and the ensuing problems have led to a need to consider the following implications:

1. The nature of collaboration and/or cooperation demands the explication of responsibility.
2. Linkage is important and requires a highly systematic communication system and easy access to involved people.
3. The amount of time required for planning must be built into the work roles of individuals engaged in a planning process.
4. Support systems are vital to sustained efforts and must be developed and maintained both within and among collaborating institutions.
5. Participants require extensive knowledge of individual and organizational change processes. Knowledge of how people and institutions change and respond to mandates for change is an important but neglected component of inservice program development.
6. Institutions of higher education must recognize that the role of college consultant must be equal in status to research and publication if the requirements of the position are to be met.
7. To be useful, the evaluation component of a project must be manageable and geared to the stage of development. Over-

ambitiousness, compulsiveness and a quest for "final" answers lead to feelings of helplessness and inadequacy that are not warranted.

8. Research should be fostered on both field-based and theoretical levels.

Whereas these implications derive from the original design and hypotheses, other softer but equally insistent murmurings are being heard. These "intimations" have not emerged from "hard" data but from casual observation, incidental learning, intuition and soul searching.

1. The local education agency inservice coordinator who is effective has special qualities not necessarily linked to job role. This person is an inquisitive, energetic, task oriented risk taker with a dream. The individual has the ability to take a problem solving stance and delay immediate solution gratification.
2. Similar characteristics are necessary for faculty members to be effective in the consultant role. Despite attainment of high professional status, these individuals must be willing to learn new skills and assume a position that requires a cooperative and egalatarian perspective.
3. Communication is possibly the most critical factor in a collaborative effort. Lack of access or delayed transmissions of information result in a breakdown of trust.
4. Collaborative projects must not diminish the merits of individual expertise, but rather recognize and encourage personal as well as group efforts.

In assessing the worth of two years of effort, it appears that we have changed tremendously and yet not changed at all. We are clinging to our basic hypotheses although this perseverance is at times founded more on feeling than hard data.

Perhaps the most productive thing that has occurred thus far is that people in local education agencies, people in institutions of higher education and people in the State Department of Education call each other by their first names and are sharing the frustrations of building a collaborative working model. There is optimism that what is being built is a foundation from which sensible, logical and effective comprehensive personnel development can evolve. Project participants are looking forward to Year Three. Perhaps that is the greatest measure of success.

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